

Advanced Search Tips

The following techniques provide additional ways to refine your searches.

Parentheses (nesting)

- Within a Boolean search, words may be grouped using parentheses to specify the order in which they will be combined. Without parentheses, words will be combined left to right. Using parentheses when three or more words are combined with Boolean operators will combine the words within the parentheses first.

Examples: *(car AND safety) AND (air AND bag)*; *baseball AND (brewers OR twins)*.

Plurals

- Words may be searched in both singular and plural forms by adding a plus (+) sign to the singular form.

Example: *mammal+* searches for both *mammal* and *mammals*.

- If searching for plurals that change form, combine them with the Boolean operator “OR”.

Example: *leaf OR leaves*.

Truncation

- Truncation allows for searching variations of words. Enter at least three letters of the word followed by an asterisk (*).

Example: *securit** will retrieve records containing *security*, *securities*, *securitization*, etc.

Wildcards

- A wildcard represents characters within a word. These are helpful when the spelling is questionable or if there are alternate spellings. There are two wildcard symbols, the pound sign (#) and the question mark (?). As with the asterisk, these symbols can only be used after the first three letters of the word.
- The pound sign represents a single character.

Example: *wom#n* for both *woman* and *women*.

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- The question mark can represent up to nine characters. Use the question mark alone to represent any number of characters within a word. However, if the maximum number of characters is known, including that number will create a more precise search.

Examples: *colo?r* for *color*, *colour*, *colonizer*, and *colorimeter*; *colo?1r* for *color*, *colour*, but not *colonizer* or *colorimeter*.

Adjacent terms (proximity operators)

- To find words within a certain distance of other words, use proximity operators. These operators are “with” (w) and “near” (n).
- “With” (w) will search for two words appearing in the order typed, with no words between them. “W” and a number up to 25 will search for both words in the order typed, with up to that number of words between them.

Examples: *aluminum w wiring*; *aluminum w2 wiring*.

- “Near” (n) will search for two words in any order with no words between them. “N” and a number up to 25 will search for both words in any order with up to that number of words between them.

Examples: *overview n 1998*; *chicken n3 egg*.

Stopwords

- Stopwords are so common they are not useful in a search. They should not be included as search words unless they are part of an exact phrase that is in quotation marks.

Stopwords are: *a, an, are, as, at, be, but, by, for from, had, have, he, in, her, his, is, it, of, on, that, the, this, to, was, which, with, you.*

- Quotation marks around a phrase will find results with that exact phrase, including any stopwords.

Example: *“four score and seven”*.

These tips have been modified from the FirstSearch “Help” screens. For more tips on searching the Idaho Statewide Catalog, click on the “Help” button (?) at the top left of the Searching screen, or any other “?” button.